

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 979

JC 840 457

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TITLE Learning Materials for Open Learning in Further Education. Coombe Lodge Working Paper. Information Bank Number 1606.
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PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reference Materials - Directories/Catalogs (132)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Correspondence Schools; *Evaluation Criteria; Foreign Countries; *Independent Study; *Instructional Materials; Postsecondary Education
IDENTIFIERS *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Arguing that extensive efforts to produce open learning materials should not be undertaken until the possibility of using or adapting existing materials is considered, this paper identifies current sources of materials available in Great Britain for non-advanced further education. The first sections of the paper review common types of open learning materials; i.e., correspondence course texts, programmed learning texts, textbooks designed for independent study, and specially-prepared study packages. Next, the paper notes the increased willingness of British correspondence schools to make their course materials available to further education colleges for use in open learning systems, while protecting their copyright. Cost factors are considered next, such as the availability of individual units, cash or quantity discounts, and the requirements for additional textbooks. The final sections underscore the importance of appraising course materials in light of the variability of format, quality, and suitability for open learning. Appendix 1 lists six British colleges willing to discuss arrangements with other institutions for the use of their materials, and identifies the kinds of materials each offers. Appendix 2 provides a checklist for evaluating open learning materials on the basis of their content, requirements for additional study material and special arrangements, introduction, subject-matter, form of presentation, conclusion, tutor marked assignments, and suitability for open learning. (LAL)

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LEARNING MATERIALS FOR OPEN LEARNING
IN FURTHER EDUCATION

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This paper has been produced for the purpose of discussion and has been made possible through co-operation between the Further Education Staff College and the Council for Educational Technology.

Suggestions for modification or information which could usefully be considered for inclusion in revisions of this paper should be forwarded to:

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LEARNING MATERIALS FOR OPEN LEARNING IN FURTHER EDUCATION

1. One of the major obstacles to the rapid extension of open learning is an apparent shortage of suitable learning material. The writing of open learning texts demands special skills and is a time-consuming and therefore expensive process. It is therefore important to ensure that effort expended on producing open learning materials is not unnecessarily duplicated. Indeed extensive writing exercises should not be undertaken until the possibility of using or adapting existing material has been considered.
2. At present there seems to be no body which undertakes any comprehensive and systematic review of learning material. The purpose of this note is to provide as an interim measure some record of current sources of material available, particularly for non-advanced further education. It is hoped that within the foreseeable future some agency or agencies can be identified as providing a more systematic overview.
3. The sources of open learning material are likely to be:
 - a. correspondence course texts -
current moves towards making such material available to further education colleges will be discussed below.
 - b. programmed learning texts -
since the mid-1960's a large number of programmed texts of widely varying quality have been produced. Some listings have been produced, but not all have been updated. For further information see:

International Yearbook of Educational & Instructional Technology, 1980-81. (Kogan Paul).
 - c. text-books -
many text-books are now produced in styles which enable students to learn independently. Certain subjects such as mathematics lend themselves to styles which encourage self-paced or independent learning. A recent (as yet unpublished) review by Guildford Educational Services has shown that various publishers claim to have produced books which could be used for independent study of all the currently published standard units of the Technician Education Council. The validity of such claims has still to be tested but there are already some examples of open learning systems based on text-books supplemented by study guides and assignments.
 - d. specially-prepared study packages -
 - (i) many teachers have prepared learning packages for use within or as an extension of conventional teaching/learning situations. Such material exists both in the secondary schools and in further education. Very little has been done to collect information about such material although some

teachers' centres and specialist subject associations have arrangements for the exchange of material. The Inner London Education Authority has available, through its Further and Higher Education Curriculum Unit, a very wide range of material. There are, however, very serious obstacles to the wider dissemination of such material not least of which is the lack of review processes designed to determine whether the material can be used out of the context for which it was originally designed.

- (ii) if it is decided that no suitable material is available for a given purpose, then it must be written. It will generally be written by teachers who have substantial experience in teaching the material in a conventional context. The open learning material is likely to be based on sets of notes or handout material. The Council for Educational Technology, through its Open Learning Programme, is able to provide assistance in training writers. The Council has also produced an open learning text under the title - 'How to Write a Distance Learning Course'.

The Correspondence Colleges

4. Many further education colleges already have experience of using correspondence course material produced by the National Extension College, generally in schemes of 'FlexiStudy' in which students learn from correspondence course material but with varying degrees of tutorial and other support from the college. At present (April 1981) there are about 80 FlexiStudy centres with a total of approximately 5,000 students working in this mode.
5. Recently, a number of correspondence colleges have indicated a willingness, subject to certain safeguards, to make course material available to further education colleges for use in open learning systems. Appendix 1 provides a list of organisations known to be prepared to enter into discussion with FE colleges.
6. Most of the correspondence colleges have available a wide range of GCE, business and professional courses. Some also offer a variety of vocational and technical courses although the general practice is to deal with the theoretical content of such courses, leaving students to make their own arrangements for any requisite laboratory or practical work.
7. All the correspondence colleges are concerned to protect their copyright and some of them are likely to seek from senior officers of colleges, certain formal undertakings. Some may exercise this through a device of retaining ownership of the material so that what is sold is the right of use by a single student. Some organisations will not allow their material to be available in libraries.
8. The learning packages of the various correspondence colleges varies widely in format and style but particularly in the extent of the coverage of each package. For example, the number of units required

to cover a GCE 'A' level subject might vary from five to fifty. Costs depend on the extent to which individual units can be made available but on a single subject basis, costs are of the same order. For example, for most correspondence colleges the cost of the material for a GCE 'A' level subject will be about £15. There may be discounts for quantity or 'cash with order'.

9. The extent to which students are required to have access to text-books varies from college to college. For some correspondence colleges and subjects the material is self-contained. In other examples there is extensive reference to selected text-books. The necessity for additional text-books may have an important bearing on the cost of the course to the student or upon the burden imposed upon an F.E. college library.

Appraising Course Material

10. It is most important that tutors selected to launch and conduct open learning schemes should have the opportunity to conduct a detailed scrutiny of material to be used. All the correspondence colleges are prepared to make inspection copies available and may be prepared to extend the four week period which is usually allowed for inspection.
11. It cannot be too strongly stressed that the available material varies widely, not only in format, but in quality of presentation. It is important to recognise that the intervention of the tutor as in some FlexiStudy schemes, may affect the suitability of the material. It has to be remembered that the target audience of the F.E. college scheme may differ from that for which the material was designed.
12. Appendix 2 provides an outline checklist which is being developed in an attempt to provide a standard approach towards appraising material. It is, as yet, in an early stage of development but does provide an indication of the sort of questions which may need to be asked.

Conclusion

13. It is clear that there is an urgent need to set up some systematic process for drawing up catalogues of open learning material and making available reviews commenting upon the content and suitability of material for various target populations. In the meantime any comments and information which would make this present paper more useful would be welcome.

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APPENDIX 1

LEARNING MATERIALS FOR OPEN LEARNING IN FURTHER EDUCATION

CORRESPONDENCE COLLEGES

The following colleges are prepared to discuss arrangements for making material available for use in FE open learning systems.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

Intertext House,
Stewarts Road,
London, SW8 4UJ.

Telephone: 01-622-9911.

ICS has available 500 courses in General Education, Business Studies, Technical Studies, Electronics Studies, Emergency Services, Horticulture and Agriculture and in Creative and Leisure Activities.

NALGO EDUCATION SERVICES

NALGO Education Department,
1 Mabledon Place,
London, WC1H 9AJ.

Telephone: 01-388-2366.

NALGO correspondence courses are primarily provided for its members in National and Local Government who wish to further their education and qualify for promotion. The NALGO Correspondence Institute provides for some 20 professional examinations of special interest to those in public service as well as a range of GCE courses. NALGO, in conjunction with the Local Government Training Board, has a programme for introducing Directed Private Study Schemes for the B2 and B4 Boards of the Business Education Council.

NATIONAL EXTENSION COLLEGE

National Extension College,
18 Brooklands Avenue,
Cambridge, CB2 2HN.

Telephone: Cambridge (0223) 63465.

The National Extension College is a non-profit-making organisation which as well as operating correspondence courses has developed FlexiStudy. There are currently about 40 different FlexiStudy Courses. A number of developments are in train including the enhancement of FlexiStudy with radio and television broadcasts and the development of a self-instructional package in BASIC to accompany the BBC TV Computer Literacy Project.

PITMANS

Pitmans Correspondence College,
Worcester Road,
Wimbledon,
London, SW19 7QQ

Telephone: 01-947-6993.

The College offers about 200 courses in the field of Professional and secretarial courses. As well as covering a number of professional subjects such as Shipping, Freight Forwarding, Overseas Trade, Marketing Transport, Purchasing & Supply and Stores, there are courses leading to examinations of London Chamber of Commerce, Royal Society of Arts and Pitman Examinations Institute in skills subject, i.e. Shorthand, Typewriting and Audio-typing. A number of leisure courses - Art, Astronomy and Writing - are also available.

THE RAPID RESULTS COLLEGE

Tuition House,
27/37 St. George's Road,
London, SW19 4DS.

Telephone: 01-947-2211.

The College operates about 600 courses in GCE subjects, Business Studies, Health Service, Law, Local Government, Taxation and Transport. The College has already participated in a number of linked schemes involving dual registration with RRC and CFE. It is expected that new arrangements can be established for open learning schemes.

WOLSEY HALL

Wolsey Hall,
66 Banbury Road,
Oxford, OX2 6PR.

Telephone: Oxford 54231.

Wolsey Hall has tended to concentrate on courses in the academic field ranging from preliminary courses, through GCE 'O' and 'A' levels to degrees. More recently the range has been extended to include business and professional courses. One particular feature of Wolsey Hall is that its course structure is based on small lesson units which gives great flexibility in building courses. Material may be available on an individual lesson basis.

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APPENDIX 2

LEARNING MATERIALS FOR OPEN LEARNING IN FURTHER EDUCATION

CORRESPONDENCE COLLEGE MATERIALS

MATERIALS APPRAISAL CHECKLIST

1. Descriptive

- 1.1. What does the learning package from the correspondence college include?
 - (a) Statement of target population
 - (b) Student Guide
 - (c) Learning Text
 - (d) Model Answers
 - (e) Textbook
 - (f) Other
- 1.2. What additional material will the student need to purchase to be able to study?
 - (a) Textbook/s
 - (b) Special Drawing Materials
 - (c) Specialised Equipment
 - (d) Other
- 1.3. What special arrangements need to be made to help the student?
 - (a) Arrangements for practical work
 - (b) Arrangements for examinations
 - (c) Access to libraries
 - (d) Other
- 1.4. Are special pre-course/in course counselling arrangements needed?

2. Structure

INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. Does the unit begin with an introduction?
- 2.2. Does the introduction contain any of the following?
 - (a) An Overview - outlining major features of unit; delineating key concepts, indicating their relationship to already familiar concepts.
 - (b) A statement of the objectives - in general or more specific terms.
 - (c) A statement of essential pre-requisites - outlining the specific knowledge or skills needed before the unit can be successfully tackled.

- (d) An indication of resource implications - listing any necessary additional equipment or material; giving an estimate of the workload of the unit.
- (e) An indication of the course context of the Unit - showing how the unit relates to the rest of the Course.

SUBJECT-MATTER

- 2.3. Does the coverage of the Subject-Matter reflect the unit objectives?
- 2.4. Does the sequence of presentation link the subject-matter in a coherent way?
- 2.5. Are there sufficient self-assessment activities (SAQ) associated with each subject matter element?
- 2.6. Are these SAQ's appropriate?
- 2.7. Are the answers to the SAQ's in a suitable place?
- 2.8. Do the SAQ's cover the unit objectives in such a way that the student will be able to assess his or her progress with some confidence?

PRESENTATION

- 2.9. Choice of media - how appropriate is the choice of media in relation to the demands of the learning task?
- 2.10. Choice of Strategy - how appropriate is the choice of strategy in relation to: the demands of the learning task; the needs of the learner?
- 2.11. Organisation and lay-out - are appropriate techniques used to: clarify the organisation of the materials; to control the learners attention?
- 2.12. Language and Style - is the language clear, unambiguous and at an appropriate level of abstraction? Is the style appropriate for the learners?

CONCLUSION

- 2.13. Does the unit contain a conclusion?
- 2.14. Does the conclusion contain any of the following?
 - (a) A review, or summary, of the main points in the unit?
 - (b) An indication of possible extension or follow-up activities?
 - (c) "What to do next" instructions?
 - (d) A link into the next unit?

TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

2.15. Do the tutor-assessed assignments:

- (a) Reflect the objectives of the unit?
- (b) Reflect the objectives of the course?
- (c) Test appropriate levels of learning?
- (d) Contain appropriate activities?
- (e) Adequately sample the subject-matter?

3. Use of Material in college OLS

- 3.1. Is the material suitable for the type of Open Learning System operated by the college?
- 3.2. Could the material be adapted to make it more suitable for use in the college system? If so, what effort would be needed?
- 3.3. Would this material enable the college to serve needs which are not, at present, satisfied?

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March 1981

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